

INTERNAL IMPROVEMENTS.

SPEECH

OF

HON. A. W. VENABLE, OF N. CAROLINA,

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, JANUARY 11, 1848.

In Committee of the Whole on the state of the Union, on the Resolutions referring the President's Message to the various Standing Committees.

Mr. VENABLE said:

I regret, Mr. Chairman, that the time allotted to me will not admit of a reply to the remarks of the gentleman from Pennsylvania, [Mr. A. STEWART,] on the tariff, as I should desire to do, if circumstances rendered it proper. I trust that on some other occasion I shall have an opportunity; and if I should not, I know that the distinguished chairman of the Committee of Ways and Means of the last Congress, who elaborated and introduced the bill regulating the present tariff, and many other able and experienced individuals in this House, will do this subject ample justice. I can assure the gentleman from Pennsylvania that my friend from Illinois [Mr. McCLEARNED] was not frightened by the ghost of a military chieftain, to which he alluded in his remarks. It was a ghost-seeing of the gentleman himself—not the ghost of General Taylor, but of the tariff of 1842, whose elegy and eulogy the gentleman never failed to pronounce whenever he addressed the House. I should like to know whether his friend, General Taylor, who had been so unceremoniously introduced to the House, would thank him for presenting the issue of a high tariff as connected with his name. Does the gentleman speak by authority, and now pledge his nominee for the Presidency as responsible for such doctrines? If he does, I am glad to hear it; for it is an issue which General Taylor has most cautiously avoided, and on which, up to this time, he is uncommitted. If the views of the gentleman and General Taylor correspond upon this subject, perhaps he congratulates himself upon the prospect of again galvanizing into life the dead tariff of 1842: a death deeply deplored by the gentleman, for which, however, he is in no way to blame. It "cannot shake its gory locks at him, and say, you did it." No! never did knight in harness do battle for his lady-love with more high chivalry than has the honorable gentleman done battle for the principle of protection.

But there is another question upon which I ask the indulgence of the committee—a question which, to my mind, presents one of the most important, one of the most intensely-interesting issues which has ever been raised. I am admonished that this is an old question, and to many uninteresting. The struggle had been long, and the victory been doubtful. Sometimes the friends of

State rights indulged hopes of complete triumph, and as often had they seen gloom and despondency take the place of the fondest hopes. For thirty years I have been a close observer of the political history of this country, and with whatever intellectual powers I possess, and after all the lights which had been thrown upon my mind by observation and experience, I still feel, as I ever have felt, that it was one of the most important questions agitated in this country. I allude to the question involved in the able and luminous message of the President, now on your table, and which communicates the reasons for his disapprobation of the river and harbor bill of the last session.

This subject of the right of the General Government to prosecute schemes of internal improvements within the States was constantly presenting itself to the consideration of Congress, and had at all times been resisted—sometimes with success, often with a different result, but never without a solemn protestation of the opposers of that doctrine, on constitutional grounds. When the friends of the doctrine felt strong, the claim was strongly made as indispensable to the healthy action of the Constitution itself, broadly set forth in the instrument, and of undoubted authority. When the wantonness of expenditure which this system always produces excited public notice, and called down thunders of reprobation from the people; when the veto of the President placed an effectual obstruction in the way of its progress, the tone of its advocates underwent a corresponding change. That which before was clearly authorized by the Constitution, now became an incident; that without which the healthy action of the Constitution could not be maintained, now became an inference from one or many known grants in that instrument.

I feel under obligations to the gentleman from Pennsylvania, [Mr. STEWART,] and the gentlemen from Indiana and Ohio, [Mr. C. B. SMITH and Mr. VINTON,] for coming up so boldly to the mark, for making a platform so broad—so wide—that their position could not be mistaken. We have been told by the gentleman from Indiana, [Mr. C. B. SMITH,] that the only limit to the power of Congress to make improvements was the will of Congress; that, upon this subject, that will was supreme, acknowledging no limits but those which the dis-

erection of the legislature would impose upon itself. Do I here learn that all those securities for the exercise of State sovereignty which we had fancied ourselves to possess, are swept away? I, together with those who maintain the rights of the States, and a strict construction of the Constitution, have been accustomed to believe that our broad rivers and fair lands belong to us, and that we are not merely tenants at sufferance to the Federal Government. If State rights and State sovereignty be a phantom, it is high time for us to know it. We should be taught our allegiance and the corresponding obligation to obedience. I have not so learned the Constitution, or the contemporaneous construction of that instrument. Those venerable sages and patriots who gave to us this rich legacy—an abiding hope in every peril, a sure guide in political doubt and darkness—had no such conclusion in view when they declared, that all powers not delegated by the Constitution to the Federal Government or prohibited to the States, are reserved to the States respectively and to the people. They meant what they said, and have left in their political history the most conclusive evidence of the fact.

And here permit me to say, that I have never felt more gratified, and I know the Democratic party of the country will feel and acknowledge their obligations to the distinguished gentleman from Ohio, [Mr. VINTON,] for the high, but unwilling, compliment which he paid the President of the United States for his veto message. As soon as it was read, that gentleman, so thoroughly acquainted with the operation of such causes on the public mind, whose long experience and deep sagacity had not unprofitably employed the lessons he had acquired, was so electrified, so afraid of its influence on the people, that he asked for the appointment of a committee of one member from each State, that they might have an opportunity to exert their ingenuity in framing a reply to go out with it; for he proposed that the message should not be printed until the committee should make their report. There was no parallel case but one, and that was when Mr. Madison, after having witnessed the glowing, fervid eloquence of Fisher Ames on the discussion of a great and absorbing question, moved that the House adjourn; for he deemed it necessary that they should have time to recover themselves from the effect of such overwhelming eloquence before they voted on the subject under consideration. The distinguished chairman of the Committee of Ways and Means felt that something must be done to foil the blow and break the point of this polished shaft. I thank him for the compliment. It was well deserved; it was justly earned by one of the ablest and clearest arguments which had ever been communicated to this House. It took the broad constitutional ground, one on which the victory would be eventually won. Here the sound sense of the people would perceive the truth. It swept away all the distinctions which so troubled gentlemen with salt water and fresh water improvements, such as were national, and such as were local. It removed these and all others, by denying to Congress entirely, the power to make internal improvements.

A grateful people will honor and posterity reverence the man who, in the hour of peril, has achieved so much to restore what has been lost, and to bring back the simplicity of our republican

faith. The friends of State rights may well prize the ability of the Executive in thus triumphantly defending republican truth, and feel a sacred pleasure in aiding him to restore the breaches made in those bulwarks erected by patriotic hands around the citadel of our liberties. The warning given us will not be unheeded; and although the plague may not be entirely stayed, sound reason must prevail, and the elements of triumph will be found in this unanswerable argument. I have said thus much, because it would be useless repetition in me to recite the positions or the arguments of the message. I would only weaken them by the effort, and am not vain enough to suppose that I could make them more striking. I seek only to apply the conclusions, and, with the armor of proof furnished by the message, assail those who have taken the field against it.

We have seen Legislative, Presidential, and Executive approbation invoked to sustain and fix this assumption of power. Those palmy days, so often alluded to, when we were all Federalists and all Republicans, or, in the language of the gentleman from Ohio, [Mr. VINTON,] we "were all Americans"—days growing even more lovely in the distance—designated as the era when great minds gave up all narrow views of State sovereignty, and, owning allegiance to the General Government, arrayed themselves on the side of liberal construction,—we are told that then commenced our career of national prosperity, the progress of which defies calculation, and in which the very day-dreams of the most enthusiastic were more than realized.

The administration of Mr. Monroe is characterized as the era of good feeling, when the bitter streams of party rancor, purified and sweetened by patriotism, mingled in peace; when, by general concession and mutual compromise, all the elements of discord were neutralized, and men forgot the claims of party in the desire to secure the greatest good to the country. Sir, this is a fancy sketch; it may do for those who admire the romance of history. It may serve to amuse, but not to instruct. Yes, sir, I remember the time alluded to. It was in the time of Mr. Monroe. It was his morbid anxiety to amalgamate parties in the country, and obliterate the great lines of demarcation between them, that has left us so sad a legacy. We now realize how much might have been done; how much could have been saved by such a masterly exposition of the Constitution as that which lies upon your table. He might have firmly fixed the landmarks, which, one by one, have been obliterated by the encroachments of Federal power upon the rights of the States. The astounding doctrine that the right to make internal improvements has no limit but the rule of Congress in the premises, would not have been heard upon this floor. But Mr. Monroe committed that mistake which never fails to work mischief. He selected for his counsellors men of political creeds differing from his own; made a Mosaic cabinet of Federalists and Republicans, and, as a necessary consequence, Mr. Monroe's opinions on constitutional subjects, at one period of his administration, can be quoted by way of set-off against his opinions at another. This great blunder gave color to his whole policy. I do not blame Whigs for being Whigs, or for taking Whig advisers. I am sure that that party, under whatever name it has

been known, has never been guilty of that folly for which they profess to admire Mr. Monroe, to wit: that of selecting advisers from, and dividing power with, the party opposed to themselves. Mr. Monroe had seen the difficulties which arose during the war of 1812. The deep and disheartening gloom thrown over the country by the Hartford Convention, had left its impression upon his mind. The imminent danger of a dissolution of the Union by the efforts of that memorable assembly, was fresh in his memory, and he made a mistaken effort at conciliation. Read his message when he commenced his administration, and you will see that he utterly denied the power of this Government over internal improvements; and then his messages towards the close, and you will say not, "how are the mighty fallen," but you are constrained to say, that a wonderful "change had come over the spirit of his dream." Sir, this is the legitimate result of any effort to elect a no-party President, or to establish a no-party policy. I deprecate party rancor; it is a great evil, perhaps necessarily growing out of party existence. It may be the trail of the serpent which is left on all human institutions, creating a tendency to evil and excess; but it is an evil much less pernicious in its consequences than that complying, compromising spirit, which abandons principle for a false peace, and mistakes the absence of excitement as the evidence of security. Give me the refreshing breeze which curls the surface of the waters, even though it sometimes rises to the storm, and lashes the shore with the waves driven mountain-high. Give me this, but not the stillness of the *Dead Sea lake*, whose surface, acknowledging neither the influence of the breeze or gale, lies smooth and still—the emblem of that death from which it derives its name. Give me that wholesome collision of minds which is found in the party contests of our country, by which light is elicited, truth illustrated, liberty endeared, and great principles secured. It is not in such conflicts as these that the people ever loose their hold on the Government, or fail to press responsibility upon their rulers. It is after the glorification of victory, that the generosity of the victors makes concessions to the vanquished, and great truths are obscured by compromise, precedent becomes principle, and one error the prolific ancestor of a host of others. For error is prolific, is cumulative in its nature. Each step which marks departure from truth with increasing distance from the right, brings accumulated evils, and terminates in a labyrinth dark and inextricable.

I would now turn to the honorable gentleman from Tennessee, [Mr. STANTON] who yesterday gave his views to this House, differing from the doctrines of the message. The gentleman told them, as we had been told by other gentlemen, that bright and great names had sustained opinions in conflict with those of the President. That Madison, Monroe, Jackson, and others had approved bills appropriating money for internal improvements. I have high authority that "great names will hallow song;" but not that they would sanctify error. If precedent was worth anything in settling the construction of the Constitution, all the early Presidents are in our favor. The President has so fully illustrated this, in the historical parts of his message, that it would be useless to consume time in repeating them. But there is one important event in the early history of this subject to which

I will presently call the attention of the House. For General Jackson, who had been so strongly referred to by the gentleman from Tennessee, I have as great respect and veneration as any one can feel. His fame needs no effort of mine to heighten or perpetuate it. His memory is embalmed not only in the hearts of his friends, but in the hearts of a whole people, who delight to do him honor. His brow is entwined with a chaplet of never-fading laurels, and his name was written with a ray of light in his country's history; and palsied be the tongue that would darken that name, and withered the hand that would rob him of his laurels. Yet I feel no more respect for General Jackson's errors than for those of other men. They would do more harm, and were, therefore, the more to be feared. It was in these latter days left for Mr. Polk to clear away all the difficulties from the question, and take the ground that our Government has no constitutional power to make internal improvements. If the door was opened, we opened Pandora's box, from which numberless evils would fly out. This was the opinion of the fathers and framers of the Constitution. The power to cut canals was expressly denied by the Convention. I have before me the first volume of the Madison Papers, which gentlemen could read at pleasure, which showed that, when the express authority to cut canals was sought to be ingrafted by Dr. Franklin upon the clause to establish post roads, it was rejected by the Convention which made the Constitution. If anything could exclude an inference, surely this would. Can any person, honestly inquiring for the true meaning of the instrument, perceive any difference between cutting a canal on the top of the earth, and thus making an artificial channel, and cutting one under the water, thus deepening a shoal, or making a harbor? If the power was a clear and indispensable incident, why was it not declared in the Convention that the amendment was unnecessary because the power already existed? If the power be so clear and undoubted, why have its advocates sought to derive it from so many clauses in the Constitution? A distinguished Senator from South Carolina, now in the other end of the Capitol, whose powerful intellect subjects to a most severe analysis everything which is brought before it for consideration; of whose mind it may well be said that it possesses the combined characteristics of a solar microscope and a powerful telescope, bringing distant objects nearer, and developing their most minute properties; even he, in 1819, whilst Secretary of War, made his report on roads and canals, and although not expressing a decided opinion as to the constitutional question, left the fair inference that the right of the Federal Government to construct roads and canals was an appendage of the war-making power. The same eminent individual, in a recent report, claims that the power to regulate commerce has given all necessary authority. It is both amusing and instructive to see the various shifts which have been resorted to to find the warrant for this great national system of enterprises. We find Mr. Clay committed to both sides of this great question, and, perhaps, he never made a greater and more unanswerable argument on any occasions than those in which he conclusively demonstrates the unconstitutionality of internal improvements and the United States Bank. If I, with others, have not been able to give up the convictions to which

his great reasoning powers assisted us, or to appreciate the force of his effort to answer his own argument, the fault is not ours.

The friends of this power sought for the warrant under the clause establishing post roads, which, they say, means to make post roads, railroads, turnpikes, and canals. Driven from this shift, they took refuge under the grant to regulate commerce; again, under the right to pass all laws necessary to carry the above powers into execution; and finally, in despair, under the "general welfare" clause—a clause under which anything could be done, and all the powers of the Government be concentrated in one single individual.

There is nothing which I venerate more than this Union. No richer legacy can I leave to my children and to posterity than the Union, firm and unshaken. But, as much as I love it—as much as I should dread to see it sundered—there is one thing which I dread much more, and that is consolidation—the concentration of all the powers of the States around the Federal Government. Such were the sentiments of Jefferson, Madison, and many of the fathers of the Constitution. Such, most eloquently, does Mr. Jefferson declare to be his views, in a letter to Mr. Giles, shortly before his death. And here, sir, I would read a passage of history* on this subject, to which my colleague [Mr. McKAY] called my attention some days since. I thank him for the fact—one which his minute information as to the political history of the country enabled him to bring to the help of the friends of the Constitution, as we of the State-rights school understand it. It is a contemporaneous exposition of the Constitution by an act of the House of Representatives, the same year that the Constitution was adopted. Of that House, Madison and many others were members, who had been amongst the framers of the Constitution, and who must be presumed to understand its meaning. The debate arose upon a bill to fix the permanent seat of Government, September, 1789. The place designated by the bill included a district of country upon the Susquehanna, within the jurisdiction of the States of Pennsylvania and Maryland, within whose boundaries a part of the river Susquehanna ran, and finally emptied into the Chesapeake bay. The subject was fully discussed in Congress, then in session in New York, many of the framers of the Constitution partaking in the debate, and the bill was passed, with this proviso: "Provided, That this law shall 'not be carried into effect until the States of Pennsylvania and Maryland shall pass acts (not including any expense to said States) providing for 'removing obstructions from the same,' meaning the Susquehanna river. Mr. Madison, in arguing this question, uses this remarkable language: "If Pennsylvania will agree to this condition, we 'do no injury by making such a condition; if she 'would not agree, would it not argue a great intention and want of prudence in us to put our best 'interests in her power?' This bill passed the House of Representatives, and was postponed in the Senate, because another location was preferred. Sir, can any person doubt but that, if the right to take rivers and make roads by the Federal Government had ever been contemplated, this

would have been claimed, and Congress urged, as a matter both of duty and of right, to do the work themselves? No, sir; no! The charter, fresh from the hands of the fathers of the country, had never been disturbed by construction, or made the medium of expediency. Fresh from its makers' hands, ambitious or corrupt legislation had never, as yet, sought to make its sound provisions a breastwork from behind which to assail the rights of the States or the liberties of the people. The pure, vestal fire of patriotism burnt with a bright light on the high altar, and the Father of his Country watched and protected that altar. It was reserved for later days and another generation, who heeded not the construction which the makers had placed on the instrument, to make this deadly inroad upon its conservative provisions. The Congress of 1789, even in selecting a territory to be ceded by the States to the Federal Government, did not claim the right to seize upon the Susquehanna, (although, by the law of Pennsylvania, a public highway,) and clear out its obstructions, and improve its navigation. The voice of James Madison, one of the fathers of the Constitution, and one of its best expounders, was not then heard to make the claim. If such had been the meaning of the Constitution, such the intention of its framers, he would (for he had the firmness and the patriotism to do his duty under all circumstances) have risen in his place and said: Congress has the power—let us take possession of the river, (now legally a public highway,) and we will clear it out, and make such improvements as are necessary. But nothing of the sort is heard from him. Sir, in the name of the State I have the honor in part to represent, I protest against the authority of this Government to lay hands on our soil, clearing out our rivers, improving our harbors, and thus extending its jurisdiction to our very doors, and leaving there merely the child's bauble—the paraphernalia of State sovereignty.

It was with extreme regret that I heard the gentleman from Tennessee, [Mr. STANTON,] in a part of his remarks on yesterday. I had always, and do still regard the gentleman as a prominent actor in the great Democratic triumph—the revenue tariff, and a deliverance from the American system. He was found fighting, side by side, with those who contended for those great and glorious principles. I was grieved to hear him sound one note of retreat, and give the first indication of a purpose to surrender the strongest position which our party occupied. The public mind had been enlightened on the subject of the tariff, and the United States Bank. We had met the enemy, and swept the field by a brilliant victory—a victory proclaimed from one end of the country to the other; and now, I fear, the gentleman is giving aid to them to rally their scattered legions. It is always dangerous to manœuvre in front of an enemy in position. Napoleon tried it once, and with success; but success so dearly bought, that he lays it down as an expedient never to be practised, if any other will do. The present is a most unsuitable occasion to spring barren but vexatious issues in the ranks of our friends. We were told by the gentlemen from Ohio, [Mr. VINTON,] that it was never contemplated by the friends of internal improvement to prosecute the system by creating a public debt. Of course the present is not the time to make appropriations or to prosecute the

* See Gales & Seaton's Debates of First Congress, vol. 1, page 529.

system. If, however, this statement of the gentleman be correct—and I cannot doubt his candor—why were we told by the gentleman from Indiana [Mr. C. B. SMITH] and others who had spoken on that side, that, by a capricious and tyrannical veto, the President had deprived the country of the benefit of these works of internal improvement? Do we not hear from the same source that public credit is sinking, our resources being exhausted, and that from the ruinous effects of a low tariff we must resort to direct taxes? And yet, strange to tell, we hear from them murmurs and complaints, that this was a tyrannical exercise of the veto power, depriving the country of those improvements to which it was entitled at the hands of the General Government. Is it a secret horror of the veto power itself which seems instinctive to our friends on the other side—a power which has twice slain a national bank, and often put a hook in the nose of *that Leviathan, internal improvements*—a power dear to the Democratic party, the protector of minorities, and the exercise of which has always been sustained by the vote of the people, when that has been the issue at the ballot-box? I say to my friend from Tennessee, Beware how you give support to this doctrine! Beware how you open the doors of Congress, and acknowledge this power! You open a door by which uncouth millions will be appropriated. This is the third legion of the American system, always held in reserve to make the attack when we least suspect it—to divide our party and make victory easy.

We were told in 1838-'39-'40, that the United States Bank was an obsolete idea; that the people had passed judgment upon it, and that sentence of death was executed; and why make a bank issue? The compromise had settled the tariff, and party lines ought to be abolished. The Democratic party was divided and overthrown. The first act of a Whig Congress was to charter a United States bank; and Mr. Tyler, because he had the moral courage to veto that bill, received the loud curses of the Whigs, and has been ranked with every traitor, from Judas Iscariot down to the present day. Do I ask, did the people sustain that veto? The election of 1844 answers that question. I say to my friend from Tennessee, the bank is not dead. The gentleman from Pennsylvania [Mr. STEWART] watches beside the tariff of 1842, and admires its beauty—to him lovely in death—and hopes for the day of resurrection. But I tell my friend they are not dead. The serpent is hibernating—benumbed by the chilly influence of a democratic rebuke; but under the genial rays of a Whig sun in the ascendant, it will come forth, filled with vigor and with venom, ready for the work of ruin and destruction. Revive this gigantic scheme for internal improvements, saddle the country with a debt of \$200,000,000, impair its credit, and you will hear from one end of this Hall to the other the Whig banner-cry, "*a great regulator*"—a remedy for the distresses of the people—a United States bank! I recollect the spasms, the dying throes of that monster. Whatever might be said of General Jackson, the glorious victory of New Orleans was small compared with the moral courage with which he seized by the throat, and with his own right hand, brought the death-scream from it. In the battle-field, he, in common with others, exposed his person to its dangers.

His bosom was bared, it is true, to the enemies of his country; but so even those of the gallant soldiers who followed him to victory. Had he fallen on the field, he would have slept in a soldier's grave, with his war-cloak around him. The shout of victory would have cheered him, and its thrilling peals would have been the last which sounded on his dying ear. But who can estimate that iron nerve, that unbending will, which, amidst the dismay, panic, the yells of agony uttered by those who felt that the hour of retribution had come, the profound distress which invaded every village and hamlet in our country, and the artificial horrors created by capitalists and corporations to enforce their demands—moved steadily and strongly to the great purpose before him, and laid at his feet this great enemy to our peace? Our liberties survived the shock, it was true; but I am unwilling that they should be again subjected to so severe a test. I warn my friend from Tennessee, lest this should have been for us a barren triumph, not to introduce and re-establish a system by which debt after debt is to be accumulated, and such burdens as a high tariff and a United States bank reimposed.

The great manœuvre of capitalists is, to create pecuniary panic and pecuniary distress, real and artificial. Men, under such a scourge, look with intense anxiety to any promise which shadows forth even temporary relief. The men who would march up to the cannon's mouth, or stand unflinching the shock of charging squadrons, has been known to yield under such pressure. When the officer with an execution invades his house, and seizes the last comforts of his family; when he looks at a weeping wife and beggared children, the proud heart has been known to bend; and the intimation that his distresses would be relieved by a change of his vote, has been seen to revolutionize his political opinions. Such causes have produced more than one political triumph; and if those causes are re-created, will again produce a similar result.

Sir, can I forget the disgraceful exhibit made before this nation, of the individual members of Congress indebted near a half a million to the United States Bank? Can any man, who knows the influence of a creditor over a debtor, be willing to see the streams of legislation again polluted? Is any friend willing to aid in thus piercing the centre of our victorious band by this legion of reserve? Is he willing to favor a policy by which we may have to submit to the rule of a bank with \$50,000,000, and fifty years to run? at the termination of which charter, the bank will have nothing to purchase, for the people will have nothing to sell. Does he wish to see a tariff, at the highest revenue point, to pour its millions from the taxation of the people into the treasury, and then a system of internal improvements, to lavish the corrupting influences of that money over the length and breadth of our land? Has he brought himself to consent to the erection of a grand laboratory of moral miasma at the seat of Government, to diffuse its noxious and destructive influences over and upon every institution of our country? Let him for a moment reflect upon the power to corrupt legislation, to control elections, to disarm State sovereignty, which will be created. He himself, in his remarks on yesterday, acknowledged the propriety of this suggestion, when he told us that he voted (wrongly, perhaps) against the light-

house bill of the last session, because he did not believe that the West would get an equal share. What has operated on him will influence others. With such moneyed influence at the seat of this Government, does not every one perceive, that if a State shows any symptoms of resistance to the will of Congress, if a struggling minority, contending for the true construction of the Constitution is likely to become a majority, Congress can still the commotion, by pouring its millions into that State, to be expended on its roads, its rivers, and canals? Is a State laboring under the paralyzing influence of State debts, improvidently contracted for internal improvements? Congress, asserting the power to make, can purchase improvements already made, and achieve a party victory by the insidious power of gold. Is a Presidential election likely to come to this House, and is a small State doubtful—is it shivering in the wind? The will of Congress decides the doubt, and the Gordian knot is severed by a golden sword. I mean no disrespect to the small States. I speak of human nature as it is; its infirmities we deplore—but it is not sound philosophy to deny their existence.

The gentleman from Tennessee [Mr. STANTON] has asked, by what authority are buoys, piers, and light-houses erected? Where is the grant in the Constitution? I refer him to the eighth section defining the power of Congress. The authority is there given to purchase, by the consent of the legislature of the State in which the same shall be, territory for the erection of forts, magazines, arsenals, dock-yards, and other needful buildings; as also to provide and maintain a navy. The light-house is a necessary appendage to the power of providing and maintaining a navy, and is one of the needful buildings referred to in the Constitution. Congress, by the Constitution, may, and has often, authorized States to levy a tonnage duty on shipping, to improve their harbors—a resource ample for the purpose, and which will always be secured from abuse by the interest which is felt in avoiding the loss of trade by excessive duties on tonnage. Strange that my friend could see no grant in words so plain, so pregnant in meaning, and can, without difficulty, fix this alarming power by inference alone. He says, that the doctrine of the message will extinguish every light-house on our extended coast, and leave our buoys and piers to ruin and decay. It is not so. The beacon blaze will still guide our navy in the darkness of the night, and if the same light saves the trader from the strand and the rock, none will complain of the incidental advantage.

The gentleman from Tennessee has told us that the President's message was philological and metaphysical, and that all of its historical allusions were directed to one class of events.

Here Mr. STANTON asked Mr. VENABLE to yield the floor for a moment.

Mr. VENABLE. With pleasure, sir.

Mr. STANTON. I will make a single remark. The gentleman seems to have taken it upon himself to give me a sort of a lecture to-day upon my opinions, for which I am very much obliged. But, if the gentleman represented me as saying, that the President's message, generally, was of that character—that it was metaphysical and philological, he was mistaken: I said no such thing. I had spoken of the power to regulate commerce—of that part of the President's argument, and also of the historical

part of the President's message, and argued contrary to the conclusion at which the President had arrived, as the gentleman would distinctly recollect.

Mr. VENABLE. I distinctly recollect.

Mr. STANTON. With the gentleman's leave, I will now trespass upon his indulgence to reply to another part of his lecture. [Cries of No, no.]

Mr. VENABLE. The gentleman can proceed, as I do not expect to occupy the hour; at least, I desire him to proceed.

Mr. STANTON. I will say but a single word. I said that I would sooner trust the General Government with the power to make works of improvement, than to moneyed corporations. I would sooner have the Government of the United States make the navigation of the Ohio free, than to have a canal around its falls in the hands of a corporation, who levied immense taxes upon all the commerce of the West. I think it more democratic that the Government should do it, than to confide such an immense power—a power in which the whole country is so vitally interested—to a corporation.

Mr. VENABLE. Everything which I have said has been with the most profound respect for the gentleman from Tennessee, and nothing unkind has been intended. I intended to state, as must be apparent from the connection of my remarks, that the gentleman said, that so far as the power to regulate commerce is concerned, the President's message was philological and metaphysical. If I understood the gentleman, it was under this grant in the Constitution that he claimed the power, and took issue with the President. If by philological he means that the President has been extremely happy in fixing the true meaning of the words of the Constitution, and metaphysical in this, that his reasoning is profound, the conclusions clear and irresistible, I fully agree with him.

With reference to the historical part of the message, if there were inaccuracies in the references, I have not found them. I know that one event—I mean that connected with the debate in Congress as to the seat of Government, September, 1789—is omitted. I have endeavored to supply that omission, and ask the attention of the House to the irresistible inferences therefrom.

My friend from Tennessee has misunderstood me. I have no purpose to read a lecture to that gentleman. It would be presumptuous and unbecoming in me to do so, and I trust that I shall never be amenable to so grave a charge. But I cannot let the opportunity pass of expressing the hope that no friend of Democratic principles, after thirty years of conflict, on the eve of complete success, with our flag waving in the first breeze of triumph, would a moment falter or retreat. The Whig party, always vigilant, always united in the opposition to Democracy, suppressing all dividing issues amongst themselves, uniting in the common struggle for success, were ever ready to avail themselves of any seam in our armor to pierce and wound us. Always in the field, they were prepared for every promise of advantage. They often run well—sometimes, for a short period, successfully. But he could say this for them, that they were the most remarkable people in the world to display their highest speed in the race when there was no prize to win. They had, in the present instance, acquired a position in this House, as

a majority, which placed a responsibility on them before the country, and which, I suppose, they would have to meet. The gentleman from Pennsylvania [Mr. STEWART] seems to think that President-making is a part of our business, and has introduced Old Rough and Ready. I should have been indebted to the gentleman for General Taylor's political creed, for I have heard him spoken of in a very high connection with that distinguished officer. Does he pledge him to a United States bank, the tariff of 1842, and the whole American system? Does he pledge him as denouncing the war, and adopting the Wilmot proviso? On the subject of his political creed, General Taylor has been far from communicative. In a letter to his friend in Mobile, he avers that his mind has been so taken up with his military profession, that he has formed no opinions upon these subjects. If the gentleman is advised of his opinions, this House and the country will acknowledge the obligation if he should favor them with a revelation. I did not come to this House as a President-maker—a *Guy of Warwick*. I shall take occasion, if possible, to obtain from every individual spoken of as a candidate for that office the avowal of his opinions upon the great issues before the people. I shall endeavor to circulate amongst my constituents such information, when obtained. I am pledged to no man; I belong to the followers of no aspirant for the Presidency. I will vote for no man for President whilst ignorant of his political creed, and, to obtain my vote, that creed must be Democratic.

There is, however, another subject of grave importance, to which I desire to direct the attention of the committee. A few days since, an honorable gentleman from Massachusetts [Mr. HUDSON] introduced a resolution recommending the withdrawal of our troops from Mexico, repudiating all thought of indemnity, and of course disapproving of the origin and cause of the war. After a display of the usual parliamentary tact to avoid a direct vote, the House determined that the resolution should be met. This vote was given after a failure of a motion to lay the subject on the table, and failure of an effort to reconsider that vote. When the resolution was put upon its passage, but forty-one could be found to stand by it. Again, on the next day, a vote of thanks to General Taylor was moved by the gentleman from Delaware, [Mr. HUSTON,] and my friend from Indiana [Mr. HENLEY] offered as an amendment the additional fact, that General Taylor and his army were engaged in fighting for the honor and rights of this country. Immediately, a gentleman from Massachusetts [Mr. ASHmun] appended another amendment, which declared that they were fighting in a war unnecessarily and unconstitutionally brought on by the act of the President of the United States. Eighty-five members of this House sustained that amendment, and it now constitutes one of our recorded acts. I will not here stop to inquire as to the moral effect upon the Mexican people and the Mexican Government which will result to us from such a vote in the midst of a war. I suppose gentlemen have fully weighed this matter. Neither will I now inquire how much such a vote will strengthen our credit, or facilitate the Government in furnishing the necessary supply of troops.

For myself, I will say that no man is more ready than myself to vote thanks and express gratitude

to General Taylor, and all the gallant band of heroes, both officers and men, who have met hardships, pined in sickness, languished under wounds, and met death in this war of our country—a war in defence of the honor and rights of our country—and my whole soul and heart is in it. I am a friend to the Administration, and am determined to vote men and money to meet the exigencies of the war. I am satisfied of the ability of the President to conduct it, and I am willing to prosecute it vigorously until Mexico gives an honorable peace, or until Mexico is annihilated. But, sir, I cannot vote for thanks which contain a denunciation of the President—a denunciation of the war—and which would rob our officers and our army of all their glory; which declares our chief executive officer a murderer, our nation a den of thieves, and our gallant army a band of bloodstained plunderers. These inferences cannot be avoided if the language of the amendment of the gentleman from Massachusetts be true—and a majority of this House have so declared it. They have said by their votes that the President has violated the Constitution in the most flagrant manner; that every drop of blood which has been shed, every bone which now whitened the plains of Mexico, every heart-wringing agony which had been produced, must be placed to his account, who has so flagitiously violated the Constitution, and involved the nation in the horrors of war. This the majority of this House have declared on oath. The grand inquest of the nation have asserted the fact, and fixed it on their records; and I here demand of them to impeach the President. The poor homicide who slays his fellow-man falls into the hands of the law, is indicted, tried, and condemned. The court who would fail to notice a charge of heinous crime, verified by the return of its own grand jury, would call down upon itself the execration of all honest men. What, then, shall be said of the man placed at the head of the nation who involves that nation in a wanton and a wicked war, pours out its blood, and lavishes the lives of his countrymen in an unholy strife? This House have said that this is true. Again I call upon you to impeach the President. The finding of the bill is on your table. The Constitution authorizes and requires a majority of this House to file articles of impeachment against the President for violations of the Constitution; and I call upon you as patriots to come up fully to your duty, and justify your vote before the country. If you believe the charge, as you doubtless do—if you have voted in good faith, and that I will not question—if you are firm men, as I know you are—brave men, as you doubtless are—come up to the duty which you have assigned yourselves, and discharge it as men should do who have made so grave a charge. I know that a Senator from Massachusetts, a judge in the last resort in impeachments, has given his opinion to the public in a speech. How far such a course is proper is not for me to determine; an opinion so deliberately formed and so solemnly expressed may perhaps save him the trouble of further deliberation should the impeachment come before him as a judge. But if a majority of this House believe the President to be a murderer; if they believe that he has unnecessarily and unconstitutionally brought on a war, and thus wantonly steeped one nation in blood and clothed another in mourning; if he is guilty of an offence against the Constitu-

tion as well as the rights of the human race, which deserves the maledictions of all living men and the execration of posterity, let them clear themselves from participation in this atrocity by doing their duty, and impeaching the President. If he has stained the pages of our history in blood, let them wipe it out. Let them stand forth and say, "this blood shall not be on our skirts." As a friend of the Administration, I demand the impeachment. The President is ready to meet it, and the voice of the people will sustain him. The men of Palo Alto, Resaca, Monterey, Buena Vista, Cerro Gordo, Contreras, Churubusco, Chapultepec, and Mexico, can never feel grateful for thanks which place them on the platform with bandits and pirates. They fought in the cause and by the authority of their country. A majority of Congress, at its last session, after making a due abatement for all who voted with a protestation, declared that this war was brought on by the act of Mexico. By them the President is sustained. He is ready to meet any articles of impeachment which this House may prefer. He has no fears, for he is surrounded by the impregnable intrenchments of truth and justice.

I trust, at some future time, to have an opportunity of discussing the merits of this war question. But I shall, on this occasion, simply admonish gentlemen, that whilst such denunciations as have been recorded on our journals by the vote of this House may be harmless in a speech to an assembly of the people, may serve electioneering

purposes out of doors, they constitute matters of grave reflection when the highest legislative tribunal of the country has approved them. The people will see this vote, and the people will expect to see this vote followed up to its proper result, if gentlemen have voted with proper evidence before them. If the amendment declares the fact, our troops ought to be withdrawn, our glorious flag, which has waved over the victories of so many well-fought fields, should be trailed in the dust. The quarrel which has plunder for its object, and wanton cruelty for its anger, is more glorious in disaster than in success. Glory cannot be won by the murderer's hand, or those who do his bidding. Shame, dishonor, and disgrace must fall upon the leaders as well as the followers in such an enterprise. I say to the majority in this House, you stand committed to the charge. Meet the issue you have made. The President and the friends of his Administration will meet you upon it. I am happy, for myself, to say, that I believe our quarrel just; that the Executive has nobly discharged his duty. I stand upon the broad platform of the President's message—that the war should be prosecuted vigorously to an honorable peace, and that, in any peace which may be concluded, our country is entitled to, and ought to receive, indemnity, ample indemnity, for spoiliations before the war, and the expenses of the war. Nothing should change our hostile relations to Mexico but indemnity for the past and security for the future.